

FESTSPACE: Festivals, events and inclusive public space

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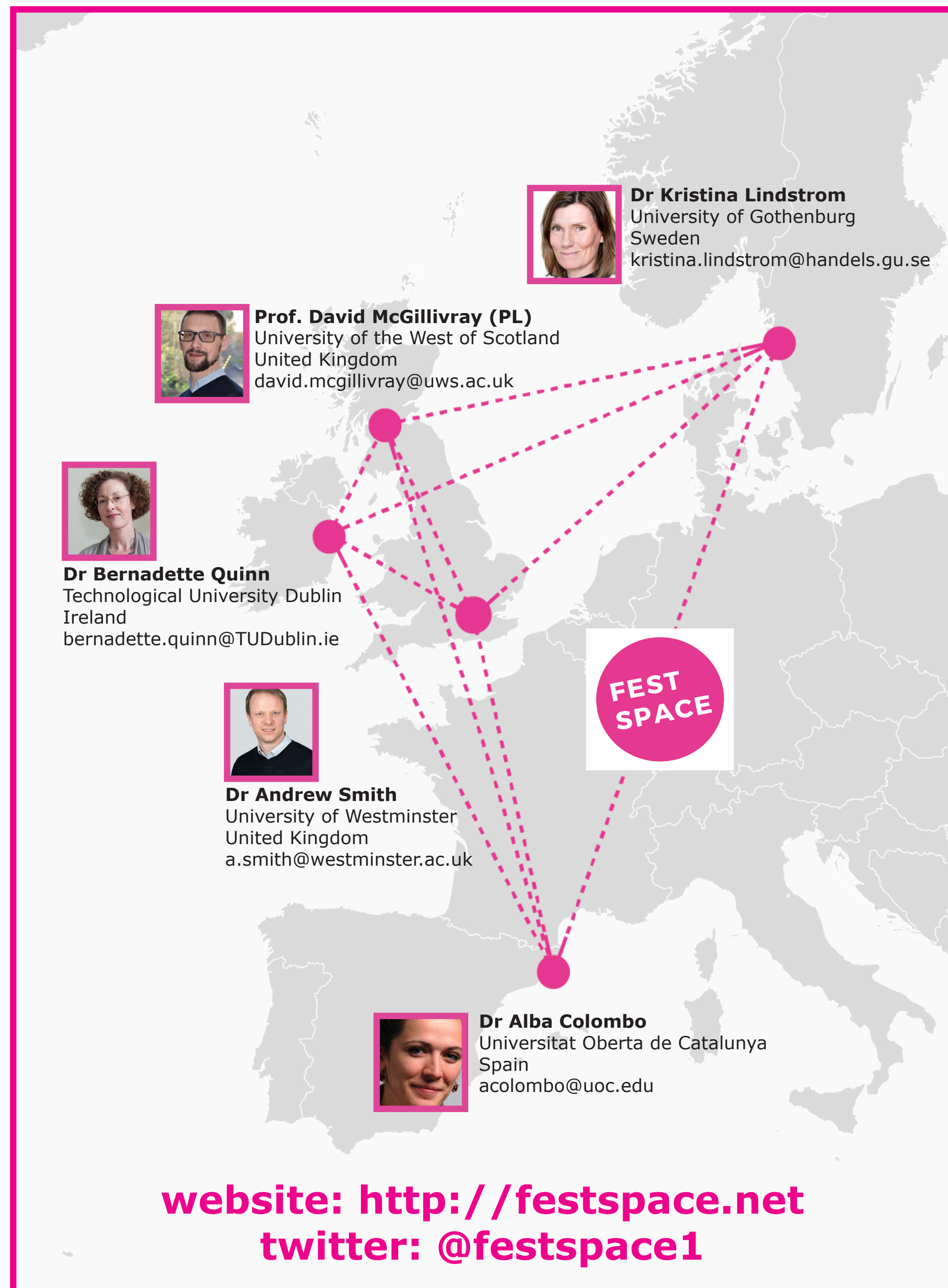
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FESTSPACE: Festivals, events and inclusive public space



This project addresses the socio-cultural effects of festivals and events that are staged in urban public spaces. Festivals and events are time-limited phenomena but they can have enduring effects on the people and places involved. They may affect *who* uses public spaces and *how* they are used, both in the short and longer terms. Festivals and events offer opportunities for urban public spaces to be reconfigured and reimagined as more welcoming and more diverse spaces. However, there is also a risk that festivals and events represent merely a superficial 'quick fix' to social problems or - worse - they might exacerbate social exclusion.



Research questions

RQ1: What different types of festive public space exists across Europe and what lessons can we learn about inclusivity from these models?

RQ2: How do festivals and events affect who uses outdoor and indoor urban public spaces and how they interact within them?

RQ3: What are the enduring effects on inclusivity of festivals and events staged in public spaces?

Focus

FESTSPACE focuses on Western European cities that are dealing with significant demographic changes caused by in-migration. The research will address urban streets, squares and parks with some consideration of indoor public spaces such as museums and libraries.

Methods

A core set of qualitative methods will be employed across the whole project:

Mapping secondary data
Visual and auditory ethnographies
In-depth interviews
Go-along interviews
User crowdsourcing
Charrettes and salons

GLASGOW



University of the West of Scotland (UWS) is leading fieldwork for FESTSPACE in Glasgow. The research team includes Professor David McGillivray, Professor Gayle McPherson and Dr Séverin Guillard who are working together with Associate Partners, Glasgow Life (managing sport and cultural events in the city) and Austin-Smith: Lord (civic architects and urbanists).

Since the late 1980s Glasgow has used tourism, retail and events to help transform the city's economy and physical environment. But various social and economic problems persist. To address FESTSPACE's three overarching research questions, the team is firstly mapping the nature of public spaces used as sites for festivals and events in Glasgow. Second, in-depth interviews are being undertaken with both institutional and non-institutional actors responsible for: planning and delivering events; urban design functions and social policy. Third, the team is undertaking visual ethnographies of targeted festivals and events that make use of different types of public spaces. Finally, the UWS team will conduct in situ go-along interviews with event participants involved in targeted festivals and events using mobile video to document the experience of participants as they experience outdoor festivals and events. These participants include representatives involved in the conception, organisation, and delivery of events. To access the views of wider audiences, researchers will also enable users of public spaces to upload their own images, and reflections using the #festspace hashtag.

To ensure different types of public spaces and different genres of festival and event are sampled across the two-year project the research focuses in particular on Merchant City Festival (arts festival, street based), Glasgow Mela (art and music, park-based), Govanhill International Festival and Carnival (arts and music, street/square based) and TRANSMT (music, park-based).

DUBLIN



The Irish part of the project is led by Technological University Dublin. The research team includes Dr Bernadette Quinn, Dr Teresa Ryan and their Associate Partners: Dublin City Libraries (DCL) and the Commemorations Unit of the Irish government's Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG).

The focus of this IP is Dublin, (population 1.2 million), a growing city that in recent decades has become increasingly culturally diverse, being home to more people of non-Irish origin than anywhere else in the state. Of particular interest is the fact that since 2012, Ireland has been experiencing a decade of commemorations marking the years 1912-1922, a momentous period when the modern Irish state was emerging. The period 2019 – 2022 will see some of the most pivotal moments in the nation's history being officially commemorated with events re-interpreting the nation's highly contested heritage. An important focus of this project is to study some of these publicly staged commemorative events.

Most of the commemorative events studied will be hosted in indoor public spaces in venues that include the main city library and ceremonial public spaces including City Hall and Dublin Castle. Data gathering has already begun at an exhibition commemorating the War of Independence. In addition, the study will focus on studying a variety of public events being hosted over the next 12 months in the 8 public spaces across the city where the hosting of events is being encouraged by Dublin City Council. Data gathering has already begun. The first outdoor event to be studied was a world music festival 'Hotter than July' staged in Smithfield Square in July 2019. Other events being studied include the Dublin Festival of History, St. Patrick's Festival and Dublin's Chinese New Year Festival.

GOTHENBURG



The Swedish FESTSPACE project is based at the University of Gothenburg under the leadership of Dr. Kristina Lindstrom. Her work will be assisted by the involvement Göteborg + Co, a municipal company that co-ordinates the city's tourism and events development.

The city of Gothenburg has, since the 1980's, been branded as a 'city of events', with culture and cultural events regarded as corner stones of this strategy. It is claimed investments in cultural festivals and events enhance the city's position as a tourist destination, but also lead to the development of an attractive and sustainable city for residents. Gothenburg is an extremely segregated city and the city's policies have been questioned by some, with event, festival and tourism development associated with exclusionary forms of urban development. Sweden is known to be a country with a strong traditions of inclusive place-making and the country has ambitious plans for the implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The Gothenburg FESTSPACE project offers a unique opportunity to investigate how ambitious inclusivity goals evolve at policy levels and how they are implemented in practice. Gothenburg is not only a city that has become associated with staging events, it is one that is particularly associated with events staged in public spaces. Many of these events aim to bring diverse groups together in central spaces. The Gothenburg Culture Festival, one of Scandinavia's biggest annual cultural festivals (since 1991), taking place in 42 public spaces in the city centre and visited by over 1 million people (51 % of the citizens of Gothenburg attended the festival in 2016), will serve as the main case. A smaller grass roots cultural festival will also be analysed as a comparative case.

BARCELONA



FESTSPACE research in Barcelona will be led by Dr. Alba Colombo who is based the Open University of Catalunya. She will be assisted by project partners from the public and private sectors: the city council (Ajuntament de Barcelona) and a prominent event company (Modiband).

The Barcelona research focuses on the use of public space for cultural events, and the potential for lasting effects beyond economic growth, including social and cultural development. The project analyses the coexistence of different events in outdoor public spaces alongside the creation and reinforcement of those spheres as inclusive spaces. Barcelona has a high population density and limited space in which different interests converge. The use of public spaces for events is managed by the municipal administration who try to generate equilibrium, but pressure over the use of those spaces is evident. In recent years, Barcelona's social structure and population composition has changed because of the influx of new migrants and recent political changes have modified the city's events strategy events from one focused on business and economic development, to one focused on events as a platform for participation, fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening social networks.

The Barcelona research will explore festivals organized by the city council but also private events. It will focus on two festivals as relevant case studies representing different space dimensions, from urban public space, semi-public space and private space. The cases are: (1) the "Sala Montjuïc", understood as an example of the recovery of a historical space with specific imaginary where local and international communities interact; and (2) the "Festes de la Mercè" as an illustrative case of the use of public space as an inclusive platform bringing together several communities living in the city.

LONDON



University of Westminster (UoW) is leading fieldwork for FESTSPACE in London. The research team includes Dr Andrew Smith, Professor Guy Osborn and Dr Goran Vodicka. The project is supported by Parks for London (a charity linked to the Great London Authority).

London is a city famed for its green spaces and the University of Westminster team is focusing specifically on urban parks. Parks are environmental assets that help to improve the health and well-being of citizens, but they are also inherently social spaces, places to meet and socialise. It is this potential for 'inter-subjectivity', where open space is transformed into public space that is the main focus for exploration in the London based part of the FESTSPACE research. Many of London's parks date back to the Victorian era, and there have long been concerns about how accessible they are to diverse audiences. Festivals and events may help to open these spaces to new users, but the growing number of commercial/ticketed events staged may add to the physical, symbolic and financial barriers that exclude some people from London's parks.

The focus is on Finsbury Park in Haringey which is known for hosting a wide range of festivals and events. This case has also been chosen because the area that surrounds Finsbury Park is very ethnically diverse and exhibits high levels of income inequality. The research involves detailed longitudinal observation studies of the park over a 12-month period. This is complemented with additional interviews with actors involved in planning and delivering events. By immersing themselves in park spaces for an extended period of time, collecting visual data and engaging with park users in creative ways, the London team is building up a detailed understanding of how staging events affects the park's inclusivity.